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ABSTRACT

This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration file, "Manassas National Battlefield Park" and other sources. The lesson could be used in units on the Civil War. Students strengthen their skills of observation and interpretation in the study of history and geography and gain practice in analyzing primary documents. The lesson explains that the first major confrontation of the Civil War took place at Manassas, Virginia, on July 21, 1861 in a farm's fallow field and that it claimed 5,000 casualties. It points out that the battle's importance lay in the realization that the struggle between North and South was more an apocalyptic event than the romantic adventure earlier envisioned. The lesson is divided into the following sections: "About This Lesson"; "Setting the Stage: Historical Context"; "Locating the Site: Maps (Central and Eastern Virginia, Maryland and Delaware, c. 1861); The Upper Potomac, 1861"; Manassas Battlefield Today"); "Determining the Facts: Readings (The Last Letter of Major Sullivan Ballou; The Letters of J. W. Reid; Some Events Connected with the Life of Judith Carter Henry"); "Visual Evidence: Images (Drawing of the Henry House, 1861; Henry House, March 1862; The Stone House, 1862); "Putting It All Together: Activities (Considering Life as a Soldier; Manassas National Battlefield Park; Local and Personal Impact of the Civil War"); and "Supplementary Resources." The "About This Lesson" section sets out objectives and materials for students. (BT)

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Teaching with Historic Places

First Battle of Manassas: An End to Innocence

Teaching with Historic Places
National Register of Historic Places
National Park Service
1849 C. Street, N.W., Suite NC400
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First Battle of Manassas: An End to Innocence

To many Americans, the firing on Fort Sumter by Confederate troops on the morning of April 12, 1861, signaled the separation of the United States into two nations. Soon thereafter, both the North and the South began preparing for war--enlisting armies, training troops, and raising rhetoric to a fevered pitch. At first, Americans viewed the conflict romantically, as a great adventure. To many, it was a crusade of sorts that would be decided quickly, and would return both the North and South to a peaceful way of life, either as one nation or two. Scarcely three months later, however, events near the small Virginia community of Manassas Junction shocked the nation into the realization that the war might prove longer and more costly than anyone could have imagined--not only to the armies, but to the nation as a whole. On July 21,1861, the first major confrontation of the opposing armies took place here, coming to a climax on the fallow fields of the widow Judith Henry's family, and claiming almost 5,000 casualties. Among the victims were not only the dead and wounded of the opposing armies, but members of the civilian population, and, ultimately, the wide-eyed innocence of a nation that suddenly realized it had gone to war with itself.

The importance of the first battle of Manassas, or Bull Run as it was generally known in the North, lay not so much in the movement of the armies or the strategic territory gained or lost, but rather in the realization that the struggle was more an apocalyptic event than the romantic adventure earlier envisioned.

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About This Lesson

This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration file, "Manassas National Battlefield Park" and other sources. It was written by Michael Litterst, former Park Ranger and Supervisory Historian at Manassas National Battlefield Park. Mr. Litterst is now Supervisory Park Ranger at Colonial National Historical Park.

Where it fits into the curriculum

Topics: The lesson could be used in units on the Civil War. Students will strengthen their skills of observation and interpretation in the study of history and geography, and gain practice in analyzing primary documents.

Time period: Late 19th Century.

Objectives for students

1) To explain the physical features of the area that brought the armies to Manassas.

2) To describe how the fighting of July 21, 1861 affected soldiers and the local population, both immediately and in the months and years following the battle.

3) To describe how the impact of the battle changed the way Americans of the time--military and civilian--viewed the Civil War.

4) To discover the effects of the Civil War on their own community, as well as communities around the nation.

Materials for students

The materials listed below either can be used directly on the computer or can be printed out, photocopied, and distributed to students.

1) three maps of Virginia and Manassas Battlefield today;

2) three readings compiled from accounts by soldiers and civilians about the battle and its aftermath;

3) one drawing and two historic photographs of the Henry House and the Stone House.

Visiting the site

The fields over which the first battle of Manassas was fought are well preserved as part of the Manassas National Battlefield Park. The site is located just north of Interstate 66, approximately 25 miles west of Washington, D.C. The park is open 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. year round (with the exception of Christmas Day), with extended hours in the summer months. For additional information, contact the Superintendent, Manassas National Battlefield Park, 6511 Sudley Road, Manassas, VA 22110, or visit the park's web pages at http://www.nps.gov/mana/

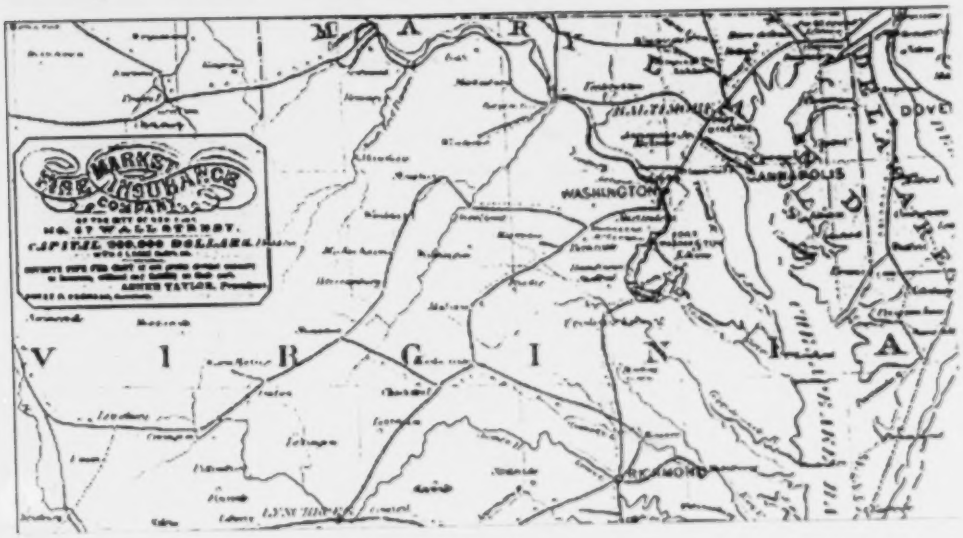
Setting the Stage

The Confederate States of America was formed between December 1860 and May 1861, when 11 Southern states seceded from the United States.The division came about as a result of decades of sectional tension between the North and the South. After the election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency in November 1860 and the attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861, the nation seemed inevitably headed for war. Most Northerners and Southerners believed the coming conflict would consist of one climactic, winner-take-all battle. Federal troops were enlisted for only 90 days, more than enough time, Northern leaders believed, to rout the Southern army and end the "callow" rebellion.

The Union's first goal was Richmond, Virginia, the newly designated capital of the Confederacy and only 100 miles from Washington, D.C. To reach Richmond, the army first had to capture Manassas Junction, an important railway junction 30 miles southwest of Washington. Troops set out for Manassas on July 16, 1861. So naive was the nation about the coming horrors that 200 or so private citizens from Washington, D.C., accompanied federal troops on the march. They hoped to witness and be entertained by this once-in-a-lifetime event.

The two armies met in battle on the morning of July 21, 1861, along the banks of a small stream known as Bull Run. In an ten-hour contest, the green, inexperienced troops of both sides bravely fought and held their ground. By late afternoon, however, the federal troops, driven from the battlefield along with many of the sightseers, were in retreat. Hope of a quick and easy victory was a casualty of the day, along with almost 5,000 members from both armies and bystanders. Daylight faded from the once peaceful fields, bringing to an end not only the first major confrontation of the Civil War, but also the romantic way in which the majority of Americans had viewed the coming conflict.

Locating the Site
Map 1: Central and eastern Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware, c. 1861.



Map 2: The Upper Potomac, 1861

(Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division)

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General Irvin McDowell's army of 35,000 Union troops marched from Washington, D.C. toward the railroad junction at Manassas. Here the Orange & Alexandria Railroad met the Manassas Gap Railroad, which led west to the Shenandoah Valley. Twenty-two thousand Southern soldiers under the command of General Pierre G.T. Beauregard guarded the area, waiting for an attack. On July 21, 1861, the two armies met on the fields overlooking a small stream named Bull Run. Meanwhile, on July 20th and 21st, 10,000 additional Southern troops arrived via the Manassas Gap Railroad. After hours of battle, the newly arrived southern units forced the exhausted and discouraged Union soldiers to withdraw back to Washington, D.C.

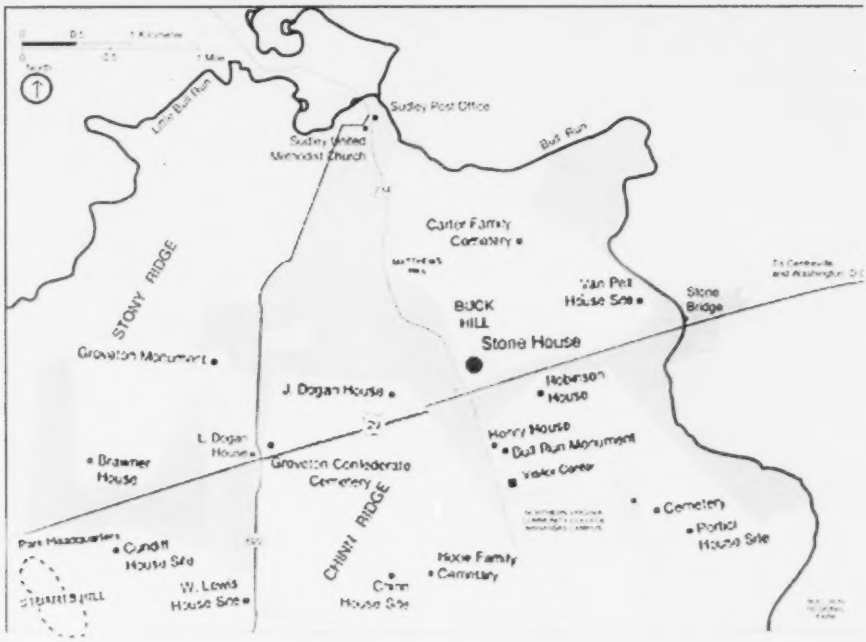
Questions for Map 1 and Map 2

1. Find Washington, D.C. and Richmond, Virginia on Map 1. Note the close proximity of the opposing capitals. Why do you think the heaviest military activity of the Civil War took place near these cities?

2. Study Maps 1 & 2. What are some of the possible advantages and disadvantages to the locations of the capital cities?

3. Examine the area around Manassas Junction in Maps 1 & 2. Identify features that made Manassas an important strategic location for both the Union and Confederate armies.

Locating the Site
Map 3: Manassas Battlefield Today



(National Park Service)

There was a second battle at Manassas (also known as the second battle of Bull Run) that was four times larger than the first campaign and raged over a much wider area. Both conflicts are commemorated at the Manassas National Battlefield Park, a unit of the National Park System. Even though war ravaged the area twice, few reminders of the battle exist today.

Questions for Map 3

1. Locate the Henry House (rebuilt in the 1870s), the Stone House, and the Portici House site. What is the distance between these sites?

2. The old Stone House was used as a hospital. Examine the map and note the advantages of using this site as a hospital.

3. What other information about the battles that took place at Manassas can be generated from studying the map?

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Determining the Facts

Reading 1: The Last Letter of Major Sullivan Ballou

Major Sullivan Ballou was a 32-year-old lawyer from Providence, Rhode Island, who volunteered with the 2nd Rhode Island Infantry. This prophetic letter was written to his wife, Sarah, a week before he was mortally wounded in the first battle of Manassas. This letter is quoted from Henry S. Burrage's 1868 volume, Brown University in the Civil War: A Memorial (pp. 105-7), courtesy of the Rhode Island Historical Society.

Head-Quarters, Camp Clark
Washington, D.C., July 14, 1861

My Very Dear Wife:

Indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days, perhaps to-morrow. Lest I should not be able to write you again, I feel impelled to write a few lines, that may fall under your eye when I shall be no more.

Our movement may be one of a few days duration and full of pleasure--and it may be one of severe conflict and death to me. Not my will, but thine, O God be done. If it is necessary that I should fall on the battle-field for my country, I am ready. I have no misgivings about, or lack of confidence in, the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American civilization now leans upon the triumph of government, and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and suffering of the Revolution, and I am willing, perfectly willing to lay down all my joys in this life to help maintain this government, and to pay that debt.

But, my dear wife, when I know, that with my own joys, I lay down nearly all of yours, and replace them in this life with care and sorrows,--when, after having eaten for long years the bitter fruit of orphanage myself, I must offer it, as their only sustenance, to my dear little children, is it weak or dishonorable, while the banner of my purpose floats calmly and proudly in the breeze, that my unbounded love for you, my darling wife and children, should struggle in fierce, though useless, contest with my love of country.

I cannot describe to you my feelings on this calm summer night, when two thousand men are sleeping around me, many of them enjoying the last, perhaps, before that of death,--and I, suspicious that Death is creeping behind me with his fatal dart, am communing with God, my country and thee.

I have sought most closely and diligently, and often in my breast, for a wrong motive in this hazarding the happiness of those I loved, and I could not find one. A pure love of my country, and of the principles I have often advocated before the people, and "the name of honor, that I love more than I fear death," have called upon me, and I have obeyed.

Sarah, my love for you is deathless. It seems to bind me with mighty cables, that nothing but Omnipotence can break; and yet, my love of country comes over me like a strong wind, and bears me irresistably on with all those chains, to the battlefield. The memories of all the blissful moments I have spent with you come crowding over me, and I feel most deeply grateful to God and you, that I have enjoyed them so long. And how hard it is for me to give them up, and burn to ashes the hopes of future years, when, God willing, we might still have lived and loved together, and seen our boys grow up to honorable manhood around us.

I know I have but few claims upon Divine Providence, but something whispers to me, perhaps it is the wafted prayer of my little Edgar, that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed. If I do not, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you, nor that, when my last breath escapes me on the battle-field, it will whisper your name.

Forgive my many faults, and the many pains I have caused you. How thoughtless, how foolish I have oftentimes been! How gladly would I wash out with my tears, every little spot upon your happiness, and struggle with all the misfortune of this world, to shield you and my children from harm. But I cannot. I must watch you from the spirit land and hover near you, while you buffet the storms with your precious little freight, and wait with sad patience till we meet to part no more.

But, O Sarah, if the dead can come back to this earth, and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you--in the garish day, and the darkest night amidst your happiest scenes and gloomiest hours--always, always, and, if the soft breeze fans your cheek, it shall be my breath; or the cool air cools your throbbing temples, it shall be my spirit passing by.

Sarah, do not mourn me dear; think I am gone, and wait for me, for we shall meet again.

As for my little boys, they will grow as I have done, and never know a father's love and care. Little Willie is too young to remember me long, and my blue-eyed Edgar will keep my frolics with him among the dimmest memories of his childhood. Sarah, I have unlimited confidence in your maternal care, and your development of their characters. Tell my two mothers, I call God's blessing upon them. O Sarah, I wait for you there! Come to me, and lead thither my children.

"Sullivan."

Questions for Reading 1

1. Men volunteered to fight in the Civil War for a variety of reasons. Why do you think Sullivan Ballou was serving in the Union army?

2. The majority of Union troops who fought in the first battle of Manassas had enlisted for only a short time and were able to leave the army and return to their families after the battle was over. If you were in that situation, would you go home or reenlist? Why?

3. As her husband foreshadowed, Sarah Ballou was widowed as a result of the first battle of Manassas and was forced to raise her children alone. How might this have affected her feelings on whether the war should be continued? If you were in her place, would you have favored ending the conflict? Why?

Determining the Facts
Reading 2: The Letters of J.W. Reid

Private J.W. Reid of the 4th South Carolina Infantry wrote several letters to his family between July 23 and July 30, 1861, from the vicinity of the first Manassas battlefield. The following is a compilation of four letters excerpted from Reid's book, History of the Fourth Regiment, South Carolina Volunteers (pp. 23-28), first published in 1891 and reprinted in 1975 by the Morningside Bookshop, Dayton, Ohio.

I scarcely know how to begin, so much has transpired since I wrote you last; but thank God I have come through it all safe, and am now here to try and tell you something about the things that have just happened. As you have already been informed, we were expecting a big fight. It came; it is over; the enemy is gone. I cannot give you an idea of the terrors of this battle. I believe that it was as hard a contested battle as was ever fought on the American continent, or perhaps anywhere else. For ten long hours it almost seemed that heaven and earth was coming together; for ten long hours it literally rained balls, shells, and other missiles of destruction. The firing did not cease for a moment. Try to picture yourself at least one hundred thousand men, all loading and firing as fast as they could. It was truly terrific. The cannons, although they make a great noise, were nothing more than pop guns compared with the tremendous thundering noise of the thousands of muskets. The sight of the dead, the cries of the wounded, the thundering noise of the battle, can never be put to paper. It must be seen and heard to be comprehended. The dead, the dying and the wounded; friend and foe, all mixed up together; friend and foe embraced in death; some crying for water; some praying their last prayers; some trying to whisper to a friend their last farewell message to their loved ones at home. It is heartrending. I cannot go any further. Mine eyes are damp with tears. Although the fight is over the field is yet quite red with blood from the wounded and the dead. I went over what I could of the battlefield the evening after the battle ended. The sight was appalling in the extreme. There were men shot in every part of the body. Heads, legs, arms, and other parts of human bodies were lying scattered all over the battlefield.

I gave you the particulars of our fight as best I could under existing circumstances. I still have a strong presentiment that I will be home again, some time. It may be a good while, and there is no telling at present what I may have to go through before I come, if I do come, only that I will have to encounter war and its consequences.

Yours as ever,
J.W. Reid

Questions for Reading 2

1. As Private Reid recounts, the battlefield was a terrifying place for the men who fought in the Civil War. How do you think these soldiers mustered the courage to stay and fight in such a situation? Do the letters of Reid and Ballou in Reading 1 give any clues as to what they were relying on to protect them or to keep up their bravery?

2. Private J.W. Reid wrote his letters following the battle. How did this affect the tone and content of his letters? How does the composite of his letters compare to the letter of Major Ballou in Reading 1?

3. Which of the two letters in Readings 1 & 2 do you feel conveys a more accurate representation of what the Civil War was like for the common soldier? Why? What would you change about the less accurate one to make it more realistic?

Determining the Facts
Reading 3: Some Events Connected with the Life ofJudith Carter Henry

The following has been adapted from an unpublished manuscript, "Some Events Connected with the Life of Judith Carter Henry," from the files of Manassas National Battlefield Park.

On Sunday, July 21, 1861, Mrs. Judith Henry, her daughter Ellen, and hired colored girl, Lucy Griffith, were living at Spring Hill Farm with Hugh [one of Mrs. Henry's sons] coming & going frequently to look after them. Hugh had established a school for boys in Alexandria and had special pupils even in summer. He was not at home on this day, but John [another of Mrs. Henry's sons], who had ridden down from Loudoun just to spend the day was....When the battle of that day began on the opposite hill across Young's Branch, shots from the cannonading were coming threateningly near, the family first considered trying to get Mrs. Henry, who was bedridden from the infirmities of age, with soldier help, removed to "Portici," the home of Mr. Robert Lewis, one mile s.e. of Henry home; but in the growing confusion this was out of the question. There was a spring house to the s.w. of the house in a depression which seemed less exposed. Here they did carry her, only to have her beg to be taken back to her own bed. This was done as soon as it was seen the spring house was no safer than the house.

The hall in front of the two downstairs rooms was entered by both Union soldiers and Confederates. A Union soldier was shot in this hallway by a Confederate, and fell almost at Ellen Henry's feet. When Ricketts' battery shelled the house, as he himself testified before a Congressional Committee the following year, to drive out the Confederate sharpshooters, the bed on which Mrs. Henry lay was shattered, she was thrown to the floor, being wounded in neck, side, and one foot partly blown off. She died later in the afternoon or early evening. Ellen Henry sought refuge in the big chimney to the fireplace during the bombardment and her subsequent deafness was attributed to injury to her eardrums from the violent concussion produced by the shelling. Whether John was in the house during the shelling or not was never stated, but since he was unhurt, it is presumed that he was outside when the bombarding began. Many years after the events of the day, an old man visiting the battlefield [said] that he was walking through the yard sometime after the close of the battle noting the many dead who had fallen fighting around the house when he came to a man lying face downward; and as he came up to this man, the man raised his face and said "They've killed my mother."

Questions for Reading 3

1. In spite of the approaching battle, Mrs. Henry was reluctant to be taken from her home. Why do you think she wanted to stay in such a dangerous area?

2. Why did Union troops open fire on the Henry House?

3. If you were the Union battery commander, would you have given the order to fire on the house? What if you thought civilians might be inside?

4. Despite the damage to their house and their horrifying experience during the battle, the Henry family remained in the area. How do you think their lives were affected by what had happened across their fields?

5. Although the Henrys stayed in the Manassas area following the battle, others moved away. If you had lived on the battlefield, would you have stayed or left? Why?

Visual Evidence

Drawing 1: The Henry House, as it appeared soon after the first battle of Manassas.

(Manassas National Battlefield Park, National Park Service)

Photo 1: The Henry House, March 1862.

Library of Congress

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The Civil War was the first major event in American history to be extensively recorded by photographers. While newspapers of the day did not have the technology to print photographs, they would often have artists copy the photographs and print the artists' sketches in the newspaper. This gave civilians at home an opportunity to see firsthand the destruction and devastation that war could cause.

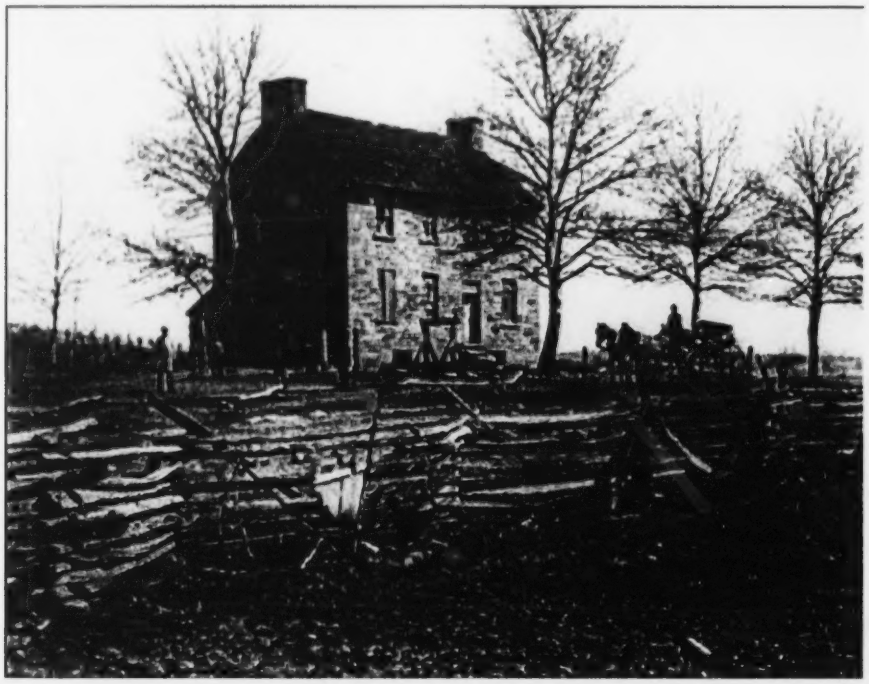
Questions for Drawing 1 and Photo 1

1. Drawing 1 and Photo 1 each depict the Henry House at different times shortly following the first battle of Manassas. How might you explain the fact that the house survived the battle but was in ruins by the time Photo 1 was taken?

2. Many times the biggest threat to the civilian population was not the battles themselves, but rather the aftermath, when armies occupied the areas. Why might this have been the case? Why might this house have been destroyed?

3. What impact do you think drawings and photographs from the war had on civilians at the time?

Visual Evidence
Photo 2: The Stone House, March 1862



(Library of Congress)

The Stone House was the home of the Henry Matthews family during the Civil War. The house served as a hospital following the first battle of Manassas.

Questions for Photo 2

1. Nearly every available building near the battlefield was pressed into service as a hospital to treat the thousands of wounded. What features in the photograph indicate the Stone House made a good place for a hospital?

2. In the Civil War, armies often moved on immediately following the end of a battle, leaving the dead and wounded in the hands of local people, like the Matthews family who lived in the Stone House. These families were not necessarily paid for their efforts or provided with medicines or other provisions. What effect would this have on the family, both immediately and over time? How would you feel under such circumstances?

Putting It All Together

The first battle of Manassas, or Bull Run, greatly changed the way the majority of Americans viewed the Civil War. Initially, soldiers like Sullivan Ballou wrote flowery, poetic letters, romanticizing the coming war and what it stood for. After the battle, soldiers viewed the conflict much as J.W. Reid did--as a terrifying, horrible experience, in which thousands of men were killed and wounded. By war's end in April 1865, more than 620,000 soldiers would lose their lives. The civilian population of the nation also was affected by the events at Manassas. Those who lived near the battlefields, like the Henrys, had their livelihood ruined because the battles were fought on their property. Others who lived hundreds of miles away, like the Ballous, were devastated by the loss of a cherished family member. No longer would Americans think of the Civil War as an entertaining spectacle, as had the Washingtonians who followed the troops to view this conflict.

Activity 1: Considering Life as a Soldier

Despite the opportunity to leave the army after the battle at Manassas, most of the Union troops reenlisted for a period of three years. Have students pretend to be a soldier writing a letter home explaining his reasons for reenlisting. Remind the students that the only method of communication during the Civil War was by mail.

Activity 2: Manassas National Battlefield Park

As is the case with many battlefields such as Manassas, few reminders exist today that provide interpretation for visitors. Ask students to debate this statement, "The United States should continue to maintain historic sites that commemorate important battle sites even though little substantial remains exist."

Activity 3: Local and Personal Impact of the Civil War

The Civil War affected nearly every part of the United States as it existed during the four years of conflict. It continues to affect American life today. Have students investigate their own home town or county to determine if it played a role in the war. If they live in a state that participated in the war, the region most likely would have raised a regiment for service in one or the other of the armies. Battles and skirmishes took place across the United States, even as far west as Arizona and New Mexico. Many modern military bases bear the names of Civil War figures. Students also could look for evidence of the indirect impact of issues leading up to the war or of the war's aftermath. For instance, was their state one of those admitted to the Union as slave or free as part of "compromise legislation?" Were Civil War veterans prominent in exploring or developing their area? Were or are there conflicts created or intensified by continuing resentments?

First Battle of Manassas: An End to Innocence-- Supplementary Resources

First Battle of Manassas: An End to Innocence will help students discover how the first battle of Manassas, or Bull Run, changed the way Americans, both civilian and military, viewed the Civil War. No longer was it a romantic adventure, but a terrible reality that affected all Americans. Those interested in learning more will find that the Internet offers a variety of materials.

Manassas National Battlefield Park http://www.nps.gov/mana/
Manassas National Battlefield Park is a unit of the National Park System. The park's web page details the history of the park and visitation information. Included on the site are photographs, both recent and historical, letters from the Civil War, and comprehensive histories of the battles that took place at Manassas battlefield.

The Civil War at a Glance http://www.nps.gov/mana/potpouri/glance/index.htm
Manassas National Battlefield Park, a division of the National Park Service, offers a general overview, year-by-year, of the Civil War on their web page, The Civil War at a Glance. Included on the web site are links to all of the National Park Service sites that were involved in the struggle between the North and the South.

The American Battlefield Protection Program
http://www2.cr.nps.gov/abpp/battles/va005.htm
The American Battlefield Protection Program, a division of the National Park Service, provides detailed battle summaries, including the first battle of Manassas, on their web site.

National Archives and Records Administration http://search.nara.gov/
The National Archives and Records Administration offer a wealth of information about the Civil War as well as Manassas Battlefield. Included on the site when searching "first battle of Manassas" is a special collection of photographs covering many aspects of the Civil War. Another interesting search on "Civil War records" provides comprehensive Union and Confederate records.

Library of Congress http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cwphome.html
The Library of Congress created a selected Civil War photograph history in their "American Memory" collection. Included on the site is a photographic time line of the Civil War covering major events for each year of the war.

The United States Civil War Center http://www.cwc.lsu.edu/cwc/civlink.htm
Louisiana State University maintains a Civil War Center that locates, indexes, and makes available all appropriate private and public data on the internet regarding the

Civil War. The site features over 4,500 links that promote the study of the Civil War from all perspectives.

The Valley of the Shadow http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/vshadow2/cwhome.html For a valuable resource on the Civil War, visit the University of Virginia's Valley of the Shadow Project. The site offers a unique perspective of two communities, one Northern and one Southern, and their experiences during the American Civil War. Students can explore primary sources such as newspapers, letters, diaries, photographs, maps, military records, and much more.